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ABSTRACT

This study reports the demographic results from the 2002 National Survey of Student Engagement. In this year, comparisons were available for other urban institutions in addition to broader national institutions. The report provides information on age, gender, ethnicity, transfer status, living arrangements, parents' educational background, annual income, student's reasons for less than full-time status, expected time to graduation, reasons for graduation delays, and expected impact of students' education on their careers. In addition, students estimated the amount of time spent on-campus outside of classes and time spent on studying, working, caring for family, and commuting. The major role that work had in many students' lives provided a consistent backdrop for most findings. Less than half the Boise State students were of the traditional college age, while more than 80% of urban and national first-year students were in this range. More than half of the first year students at Boise State reported that neither parent had graduated from college. This figure was 46% for urban institutions, and 39% nationally. Some 77% of Boise State students reported working for pay off campus, compared to 59% at other urban institutions and 34% nationally. About a third of Boise State students were working more than 30 hours per week. The percentage expected to graduate in 4 years at other urban institutions was at least double that for Boise State. (SLD)

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A Profile of Boise State First Year and Senior Students with Comparisons to Other Urban Universities

Research Report 2002-07
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Boise State University
October 2002

Abstract

This study reports the demographic results from the 2002 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). This year, comparisons were available for other urban institutions in addition to broader national comparisons. The report provides information on age, gender, ethnicity, transfer status, living arrangements, parents' educational background, annual income, student's reasons for less than full-time status, expected time to graduation, reasons for graduation delays, and expected impact of students' education on their careers. In addition, students estimated the amount of time spent on-campus outside of classes and time spent on studying, working, caring for family, and commuting.

The major role that work had in many students' lives at Boise State provided a consistent backdrop for most findings. Among the results:

- While less than half of Boise State first-year students were of the traditional college age (19 or less), over 80% of urban and national first-year students fit this age range.
- More than half of first-year students at Boise State reported that neither parent had graduated from college. This figure was 46% for urban institutions and 39% nationally.
- When asked what was the most important reason for taking less than a full course load, the main reason Boise State students gave was to work more hours. First year students at other campuses were most likely to say that they took fewer hours in order to improve their academic performance.
- 77% of Boise State students reported working for pay off-campus compared to 59% at other urban institutions and 34% nationally. About a third of Boise State first-year students were working more than 30 hours per week.
- Almost 70% of first-year students at Boise State and 60% of seniors reported spending five hours or less each week on campus beyond the time allotted for classes. At other urban campuses about 50% of first-year students and 60% of seniors reported so few hours
- Only 27% of first-year students and 10% of seniors expected to complete their bachelors' degrees in four years or less. The percentage expected to graduate in four years at other urban institutions was at least double (54% for first year students and 24% for seniors).

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- About 25% of freshmen and 36% of seniors at Boise State thought that family commitments would delay completion of their undergraduate education, while 46% of first-year students and 27% of seniors reported that money would likely delay their graduation.

Profile of Boise State First Year and Senior Students with Comparisons to Other Urban Universities

Each year the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) collects information from undergraduates at four-year colleges and universities across the country to assess the extent to which students engage in good educational practices. At the same time, a variety of personal and demographic information is also gathered from first year and senior students. This year, Boise State also joined a consortium of 20 urban institutions, allowing comparisons to institutions more similar to Boise State and the possibility of gathering additional information of particular interest to urban institutions.

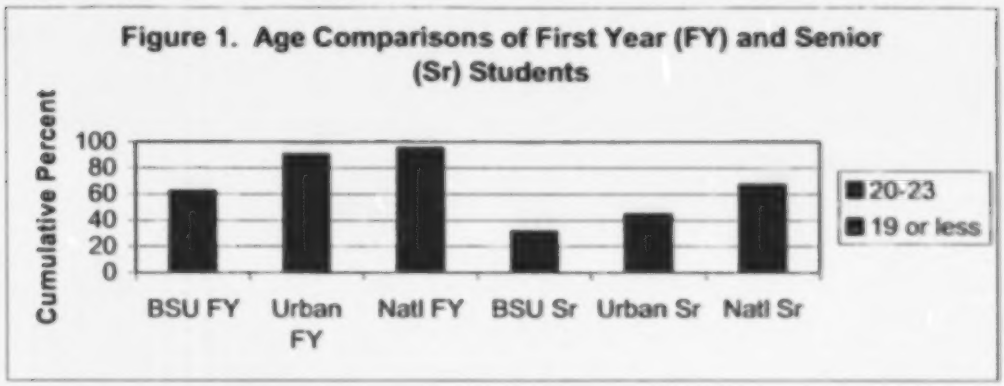
This report describes the first year (FY) students and seniors who responded to the survey. Later, additional short reports will focus on academic engagement at the institution, course requirements and emphases, student perceptions, Boise State's impact on student growth in a variety of areas, and the institutional environment from a student perspective.

Boise State was one of 366 participating institutions. The total sample was comprised of 206,844 first-year and senior students, of which 700 were randomly sampled from Boise State. The survey was completed by 44% of the Boise State students surveyed; the national response rate was 41%. A total of 121 first-year students and 183 seniors from Boise State completed the survey.

Students who completed the survey showed some differences when compared to the demographics of the entire student body. In particular, an overabundance of part-time first-year students responded. Where 51% of the first-year respondents described themselves as full-time, data on the entire student body showed that about 70% of freshmen were going to school full-time. On the other hand, full-time seniors were over-represented in the sample with 79% of seniors reporting they were full-time, while about 58% of seniors actually were full-time. In either case, Boise State had a smaller percentage of full-time students compared to other institutions. While only about half of Boise State first-year students were full-time, 88% of urban students and 95% of first-year students nationally were enrolled full-time.

Women were also over-represented in the survey with about 65% of Boise State respondents describing themselves as female compared to about 53% of the student body. Nationally, about 65% of the respondents also were female.

Boise State students were more likely to be both Caucasian and older than other students. While 89% of Boise State respondents described themselves as Caucasian, this was true for only 70% of respondents at urban institutions and 75% nationally. Also, as shown by Figure 1 below, while less than half of Boise State first-year students (FY) were of the traditional college age (19 or less), over 80% of urban and national first-year (FY) students fit this age range.

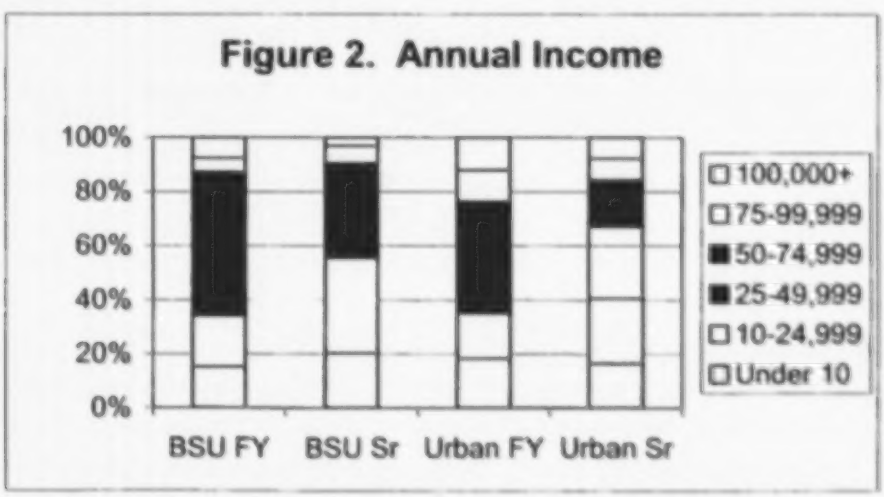


Boise State students frequently had a broader range of educational experiences than other students. While 78% of Boise State's first-year students reported that this was the first higher education institution they had attended, at other urban institutions the figure was 88%. Nationally, 90% of first-year students reported that they had attended only one institution. By the senior year, only 44% of seniors reported that they began their academic career at Boise State. This figure was similar to other urban universities (43%) but much lower than national figures (61%).

The commuter nature of the campus was evident from responses to a question that asked where students were living while attending college. While 31% of urban first-year students and 69% of first-year students nationally reported living on campus, the figure was only 12% for first-year Boise State students.

Students whose parents went to college are more likely to succeed in college, studies have shown. At Boise State more than half (54%) of freshmen reported that neither of their parents graduated from college. This figure is 46% for urban institutions and 39% nationally. However, most Boise State first-year students (74%) and seniors (89%) reported good support for going to college from their close friends and family, a figure very similar to that of other urban institutions.

Since education is related to income, it is probably not surprising that Boise State students reported lower annual incomes than students at other urban universities. Seniors reported lower incomes than first-year students. See figure 2 below.



It appeared that Boise State students were contributing more to the cost of their education than students elsewhere. When asked what was the most important reason for taking less than a full course load if they did so, the main reason that Boise State students gave was to work more hours. Freshmen at other urban campuses were most likely to say that they took fewer hours in order to improve their academic performance. Urban seniors had a similar response pattern to our seniors. See Table 1 below for further details.

Table 1. Main reason for taking less than a full course load

Reason:	First-Year Students		Seniors	
	Boise State	Urban	Boise State	Urban
Improve academic performance	25.0	34.4	25.0	20.8
Work more hours	48.5	25.8	49.1	43.3
Cost of additional courses	7.4	10.7	2.7	8.0
Scheduling problems	11.8	15.3	9.8	14.8
Course availability	7.4	13.7	13.4	13.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

There also were other indicators that Boise State students were more likely to be on their own compared to students at other institutions. When asked about the hours per week they spent on various activities, Boise State students—especially first-year students—reported many more hours spent on working off-campus and caring for dependents living in the home than students elsewhere did. Perhaps as a result, they reported significantly fewer hours on co-curricular activities such as organizations, campus publications, student government, etc. Indeed, 77% of Boise State students reported working for pay off-campus compared to 59% at other urban institutions and 34% nationally. About one-third of Boise State first-year students reported working more than 30 hours per week. Table 2 below reports mean comparisons on an 8-point scale where 1=0 hours per week and 8=more than 30 hours per week.

Table 2. Mean Comparisons for How Time Was Spent

	First Year Students			Seniors		
	Boise State	Urban	National	Boise State	Urban	National
Preparing for class	3.54	3.75	4.16	4.17	3.87	4.16
Working for pay on campus	1.27	1.40	1.62	1.58	1.54	1.88
Working for pay off campus[1]	4.83	3.73	2.32	4.38	5.05	3.65
Participating in co-curricular activities[2]	1.31	1.62	2.10	1.45	1.52	2.04
Relaxing and socializing	3.46	4.09	4.11	3.60	3.61	3.75
Providing care for dependents living with you[3]	3.43	2.01	1.56	3.17	2.79	2.23
Commuting to class	2.17	2.26	1.80	2.30	2.42	2.06

Boise State students were somewhat more likely than other urban students to be engaging in community service or other volunteer off-campus activities. While 45% of first-year Boise State students and 60% of seniors reported spending some time each week in community service, at other urban institutions only 35% of first-year students and 40% of seniors reported weekly time in community activities.

Few hours were spent on campus, however, outside of time spent in class. A total of 69% of first-year students at Boise State and 58% of seniors reported spending five hours or less each week on campus

[1] The effect size for freshmen comparisons was .41 for other urban institutions and 1.15 nationally. Effect size is a way to look at differences between means. An effect size of around .20 is considered small, .50 is a medium effect, and .80 is a large effect. For this study, we will discuss effect sizes of .40 or larger.
[2] Boise State first year students and seniors spent less time compared to students nationally. Effect sizes were -.57 and -.42 for first-year students and seniors respectively Results are similar to other urban institutions
[3] Boise State first year students spent more time on dependents than students at other urban institutions (effect size=.77) or nationally (effect size=1.29). Seniors spent more time compared to students nationally (effect size=.42).

beyond the time allotted for classes. At other urban campuses about 50% of first-year students and 62% of seniors reported so few hours.

With all the hours spent on work and family, time to graduation could be lengthened for many students. Indeed, only 27% of first-year students at Boise State and 10% of seniors reported that they expected to complete their bachelors' degrees in four years or less. In fact, while about half of both first-year and senior students expected to complete their degrees in five or six years, over 20% of seniors and 10% of first-year students expected to take more than ten years before graduating. Though students at other urban institutions also showed longer times to graduation, the percentage expecting to graduate in four years was still double that found for Boise State. These comparisons are illustrated in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3. Estimated time to graduation in years

	BSU FY	Urban FY	BSU Sr	Urban Sr
11+	10.8	1.1	20.9	14.4
7-10	13.2	3.2	19.4	19.7
5-6	49.4	41.4	50.0	42.3
4 or less	26.5	54.3	9.7	24.0

Both family commitments and financial problems were contributors to the expected delay in graduation. For first-year Boise State students, finances were more likely to cause a delay in graduation, while for seniors, family was the more likely reason. About 25% of freshmen and 36% of seniors at Boise State thought that family commitments would delay completion of their undergraduate education, while 46% of first-year students and 27% of seniors reported that money would likely delay their graduation.

The role of work in students' lives was also evident in responses to a question asking about the impact that students thought their education would have on their careers. About half of first-year and senior students thought that their education would help them to start their careers. However, about 25% thought that their education would either help them to change careers or to advance in their current careers. First-year students at other urban institutions were more likely to indicate that they would be starting a career (76% vs. 49% for Boise State).

Many students also expected to remain in the area following graduation. About 45% of first-year students and 51% of seniors at Boise State thought it was somewhat likely or very likely that they would remain living in the area after they completed their undergraduate education. By comparison, about a third of first-year students and a quarter of seniors thought it was unlikely that they would remain in the Boise area.

Summary and Conclusions

Demographic results from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) confirmed that students who attend Boise State do not fit a traditional student profile. Boise State students were even more non-traditional than students attending other urban institutions, where non-traditional students are more the norm than at land-grant institutions in small towns.

The multiple, and perhaps conflicting, priorities of our students were evident in the time Boise State students spent on jobs and family. Many students indicated that it was a trade-off between meeting requirements of jobs and family and time to graduation, with lengthened time to graduation the result of balancing their many priorities.

Finances were an issue for many students, with a number of students indicating that they took less than a full load to work more hours. Average annual income was somewhat lower for Boise State students compared to students at other urban institutions, probably because so many students were supporting themselves. Only about half of the respondents thought their education would help them start a career, while a quarter planned to advance in their careers or change careers when they completed their undergraduate education. About half planned to remain in the area following graduation, certainly a benefit of attending an urban institution.

Results should be viewed with care, however, since fewer than half of those surveyed responded. Of those who did respond, part-time first-year students and full-time seniors were over-represented. More women also responded than were represented by the entire student body.

These results will be useful when reading the reports to follow on student engagement, course requirements, and perceptions of the institution from the NSSE. These reports will follow in the next few months.

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